

The
Monkes
Tale

This Sampson nevere ciser drank, ne wyn,
Ne on his heed cam rasour noon, ne sheere,
By precept of the messenger divin;
For alle his strengthes in his heeres weere;
And fully twenty wynter, yeer by yeere,
He hadde of Israel the governaunce;
But soone shal he wepe many a teere,
For women shal hym bryngen to meschaunce.

Unto his lemman Dalida he tolde
That in his heeris al his strengthe lay,
And falsly to his foomen she hym solde;
And slepyng in hir barm upon a day
She made to clippe or shere his heer away,
And made his foomen al his craft espyen;
And whan that they hym foond in this array,
They bounde hym faste, and putten out his eyen.

But er his heer were clipped or yshave,
Ther was no boond with which men myghte him
bynde;

But now is he in prison in a cave,
Wher as they made hym at the queerne grynde.
O noble Sampson, strongest of mankynde!
O whilom juge in glorie and in richesse!
Now maystow wepen with thyne eyen blynde,
Sith thou fro wele art falle in wrecchednesse.

Thende of this caytyf was as I shal seye;
His foomen made a feeste upon a day,
And made hym as hir fool biforn hem pleye;
And this was in a temple of greet array.
But atte laste he made a foul affray;
For he two pilers shook, and made hem falle,
And down fil temple and al, and ther it lay,
And slow hymself, and eek his foomen alle.

This is to seyn, the prynces everichoon,
And eek thre thousand bodyes were ther slayn
With fallynge of the grete temple of stoon.
Of Sampson now wol I namoore sayn.
Beth war by this ensample oold and playn
That no men telle hir conseil til hir wyves
Of swich thyng as they wolde han secree fayn,
If that it touche hir lymes or hir lyves.

De Ercole



Hercules, the sovereyn conquerour,
Syngen his werkes laude and heigh
renoun;
For in his tyme of strengthe he was
the flour.
He slow, and rafte the skyn of the
leoun;
He of Centauros leyde the boost adoun;
He Arpies slow, the cruell bryddes felle;
He golden apples rafte of the dragoun;
He drow out Cerberus, the hound of helle;

He slow the cruell tyrant Busirus,
And made his hors to frete hym, flessch and boon;
He slow the fryr serpent venymus;
Of Acheloy's two hornes, he brak oon;
And he slow Cacus in a cave of stoon;
He slow the geant Antheus the stronge;

He slow the grisly boor, and that anoon;
And bar the hevenc on his nekke longe.

Was nevere wight sith that this world bigan,
That slow so many monstres as dide he;
Thurghout this wyde world his name ran,
What for his strengthe, and for his heigh bountee,
And every reawme wente he for to see.
He was so stroong that no man myghte hym lette;
At bothe the worldes endes, seith Trophee,
In stide of boundes, he a pilcer sette.

A lemman hadde this noble champion,
That highte Dianira, fressh as May;
And as thise clerkes maken mencoun,
She hath hym sent a sherte fressh and gay.
Alas, this sherte, alas, and weylaway!
Evenymed was so subtilly withalle,
That, er that he had wered it half a day,
It made his flessch al from his bones falle.

But natheles somme clerkes hire excusen
By oon that highte Nessus, that it maket;
Be as he may, I will hire noght accusen;
But on his bak this sherte he wered al naked
Til that his flessch was for the venym blaked;
And whan he saugh noon oother remedye,
In hoothe coles he hath hymselfen raked;
For with no venym deigned hym to dye.

Thus starf this worthy, myghty Hercules;
Lo! who may truste on fortune any throwe?
For hym that folweth al this world of pres,
Er he be war, is ofte pleyd ful lowe.
ful wys is he that kan hymselfen knowe,
Beth war! for whan that fortune list to glose,
Thanne wayteth she hir man to overthrowe
By swich a wey as he wolde leest suppose.



THE myghty trone, the precious
tresor,
The glorious ceptre and roial
magestee
That hadde the kyng Nabugodo-
nosor,
With tonge unnethe may discredyed bee.
He twyes wan Jerusalem the citee;
The vessel of the temple he with hym ladde.
At Babylaigne was his sovereyn see,
In which his glorie and his delit he hadde.

The faireste children of the blood roial
Of Israel he leet do gelde anoon,
And maket ech of hem to been his thral.
Amonges othere Daniel was oon,
That was the wiseste child of everychon,
for he the dremes of the kyng expowned,
Wher as in Chaldeye clerk ne was ther noon
That wiste to what fyn his dremes sowned.

This proude kyng leet make a statue of gold,
Sixty cubites long, and sevene in brede,
To which ymage, bothe yonge and oold
Comanded he to loute, and have in drede,

Or in a fourneys ful of flambe rede
he shal be brent that wolde noght obeie.
But nevere wolde assente to that dede
Daniel, ne his yonge felawes tweye.

This kyng of kynges proud was and elaat;
He wende that God that sit in magestee,
Ne myghte hym nat bireve of his estaat;
But sodenly he loste his dignytee,
And lyk a beest hym semed for to bee,
And et he as an oxe, and lay theroute;
In reyn with wilde beestes walked hee,
Til certein tyme was ycome aboute.

And lik an egles fetheres were his heres,
his nayles lik a briddes clawes weere;
Til God relesshed hym a certeyn yeres,
And yaf hym wit; and thanne with many a teere
he thanked God, and evere his lyf in feere
Alas he to doon amys, or moore trespase,
And, til that tyme he leyd was on his beere,
he knew that God was ful of myght and grace.

De Bal-
thasar



IS sone, which that highte Balthasar,
That heeld the regne after his fader
day,
He by his fader koude noght be war,
for proud he was of herte and of
array;
And eek an ydolastre he was ay.
his hye estat assured hym in pryde;
But fortune caste hym down, and ther he lay,
And sodenly his regne gan divide.

A feeste he made unto his lordes alle,
Upon a tyme, and bad hem blithe bee;
And thanne his officeres gan he calle,
Gooth, bryngeth forth the vessels, quod he,
Whiche that my fader, in his prosperitee,
Out of the temple of Jerusalem birafte,
And to oure hye goddes thanke we
Of honour, that oure eldres with us lafte.

his wyf, his lordes, and his concubynes
Ay dronken, whil hire appetites laste,
Out of these noble vessels sondry wynes;
And on a wal this kyng his eyen caste,
And saugh an hand armlees, that wroot ful faste,
for feere of which he quook, and siket soore.
This hand, that Balthasar so soore agaste,
Wroot Mane, techel, phares, and namoore.

In al that land magicien was noon
That koude expounde what this lettre mente;
But Daniel expowned it anoon,
And seyde, King, God to thy fader lente
Glorie and honour, regne, tresour, rente;
And he was proud, and nothyng God ne dradde,
And therfore God greet wreche upon hym sente,
And hym birafte the regne that he hadde.

He was out cast of mannes compaignye;
With asses was his habitacioun,
And et he as a beest in weet and drye,
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Til that he knew, by grace and by resoun,
That God of hevenc hath domynacioun
Over every regne and every creature;
And thanne hadde God of hym compassioun,
And hym restored his regne and his figure.

Eek thou, that art his sone, art proud also,
And knowest alle thise thynges verraily,
And art rebel to God, and art his foo;
Thou drank eek of his vessels boldely;
Thy wyf eek, and thy wench, synfully
Dronke of the same vessels sondry wynys,
And heriest false goddes cursedly;
Therfore to thee yshapen ful greet pyne ys.

This hand was sent from God, that on the wal
Wroot, Mane, techel, phares, truste me;
Thy regne is doon, thou weyest noght at al;
Dwydded is thy regne, and it shal be
To Medes and to Perses yeven, quod he,
And thilke same nyght this kyng was slawe,
And Darius occupieth his degree,
Thogh he therto hadde neither right ne lawe.

Lordynges, ensample heerby may ye take,
How that in lordshipe is no sikernes;
for whan fortune wole a man forsake,
She bereth away his regne and his richesse,
And eek his freendes, bothe moore and lesse;
for what man that hath freendes thurgh fortune,
Mishap wol make hem enemys, I gesse;
This proverbe is ful sooth and ful commune.



ENOBIA, of Palmyerie queene,
As writen Persiens of hir noblesse,
So worthy was in armes and so
keene,
That no wight passed hire in hardy-
nesse,

Ne in lynage, nor oother gentillesse.
Of kynges blood of Perce is she descended;
I seye nat that she hadde moost fairnesse,
But of hire shape she myghte nat been amended.

from hire childhede I fynde that she fledde
Office of wommen, and to wode she wente;
And many a wilde hertes blood she shedde
With arwes brode that she to hem sente.
She was so swift that she anon hem hente,
And whan that she was elder, she wolde kille
Leouns, leopardes, and beres al torente,
And in hir armes weelde hem at hir wille.

She dorste wilde beestes dennes seke,
And rennen in the montaignes al the nyght,
And slepen under the bussh; and she koude eke
Wrastlen by verray force and verray myght
With any yong man, were he never so wight;
Ther myghte nothyng in hir armes stonde.
She kepte hir maydenhod from every wight;
To no man deigned hire for to be bonde.

But atte laste hir freendes han hire maried
To Odenake, a prynce of that contree;